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## Airmen help tornado victims pick up the pieces

by 2nd Lt. J. Elaine Hunnicutt, AFRL Public Affairs

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Ohio

— Approximately 30 Wright-Patterson AFB volunteers helped families in Van Wert begin to put their lives back together.

An F-4 tornado with winds exceeding 200 mph struck the town, destroying more than 800 structures including homes and businesses, at 2:45 p.m. Nov. 10.

"I have seen destruction before: floods, tornadoes and avalanches," said 2nd Lt. Christopher Michele of Aeronautical Systems Center. "The power never ceases to amaze me. But the resiliency of the human spirit is nothing less than inspirational."

The event claimed five lives and injured more than 25 others, and the governor declared a state of emergency.

More than 300 jobs will be lost due to the damaged businesses. Jim and Joyce Boyd lost both their home and business in the storm. They said they were overwhelmed by the support offered by the more than 500 volunteers that arrived to help restore order to their lives.

According to Erma Francioni, sister of Joyce Boyd, the amount of damage that had to be cleaned up was overwhelming.

"We had a lot of work to do and I wasn't sure how we were going to get it all done," Francioni said.

"I flew in with my brothers and sisters from the East Coast to help our sister, Joyce (Boyd). I was surprised to see all of the volunteers that came out. We are grateful for their support and help; we couldn't have done it without them — there was just too much."

According to Michele, the site could've been a chaotic mess with volunteers having no idea where to begin.

"Fortunately, the town had already solved that problem and sent us on our way to the destruction (following the initial sign in)."

Second Lt. Richard Baysinger, ASC, totaled his car on the way to the site when he hit an icy patch on a bridge, a spot that claimed several other cars that morning. Baysinger continued on with his passenger, David Krick of ASC, to Van Wert with another volunteer who later stopped for directions near the accident.



2nd Lt. Shawn Fontenot, Air Force Research Laboratory, breaks down the wall of Jim and Joyce Boyd's garage during disaster cleanup in Van Wert, Ohio, Saturday. The Boyd's home and business were destroyed by an F-4 tornado. Air Force photo by 2nd Lt. J. Elaine Hunnicutt

"Richard Baysinger totaled his truck on the way up; that's about as good as any excuse to go home, but he continued to the site and worked all day. This is a man who has his priorities straight," said Michele.

"I lost my truck, but these people lost everything ... it really made my loss insignificant today," said Baysinger.

The victims were grateful for the assistance. "Even with all of the destruction the families made sure they took care of us with lunch and homemade cookies (provided by Mary Jo Berryman, and her friends and co-workers from the U.S. Farm Agency)," said Michele.

"We helped Mr. (Dennis) Berryman (a local farmer) clear his fields, and all he could think about was getting everyone's phone number so that he could cook us dinner for helping."

The organizer, Michele, rallied the company grade officers via an e-mail message. According to Michele it was his turn to help. "The best part for me was being able to help," he said.

"I have been on the receiving end of a tornado and the community was there for me. It just happened to be my turn."

**continued on page 2**

***continued from page 1***

The following Wright-Patterson AFB individuals helped:

Mike Barga, Juan Diaz, Albert Griggs, Lt. Col. Carolyn Winters, Capt. Michele Hanson, Capt. Kevin La Rochelle, Capt. Amy Mayer, Capt. Matthew Sinning, Capt. Carol West, 2nd Lt. Randy Allen, 1st Lt. Janice Barker, 2nd Lt. Richard Baysinger, 2nd Lt. Joseph Clapsaddle, 2nd Lt. Brian Crosby, 2nd Lt. Steven Dillenburger, 2nd Lt. Todd Dye, 2nd Lt. Shawn Fontenot, 2nd Lt. David Gwilt, 2nd Lt. David Krick, 2nd Lt. Jason Malewiski, 2nd Lt. Ryan Marcotte, 2nd Lt. Christopher Michele, 2nd Lt. Joel Mitre, 2nd Lt. Jennifer O'Hara, 2nd Lt. Zachary Rosson, 2nd Lt. Jana Therrien and Staff Sgt. Michelle Wright.

Jennifer LaRochelle and several other dependents also came out to help in the clean-up effort. @